DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 728 CS 010 710

AUTHOR Morton, Johnnye L.
TITLE What Teachers Want To Know about Portfolio Assessment.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Informal Assessment; Literacy; *Portfolios (Background Materials); *Student Evaluation; Teacher Role; *Whole Language Approach

ABSTRACT

Based on questions asked by teachers in classes, workshops, and conference sessions, this paper provides brief answers to eight of the most frequently asked questions about portfolio assessment. The questions answered in the paper are: (1) What is a portfolio?; (2) What should be put in the portfolio?; (3) How much should be put in the portfolio?; (4) How do I find time for portfolios?; (5) Are checklists available?; (6) How can I give letter grades if I use portfolio assessment?; (7) How do I start a portfolio?; and (8) How can I communicate to parents and administrators? The paper concludes by stating that portfolio assessment is an evolving concept and that teachers must continue to experiment, talk to other teachers who use portfolios, and read professional journals in a continuing effort to develop meaningful, acceptable literacy assessment. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 386 720

WHAT TEACHERS WANT TO KNOW ABOUT PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

Johnnye L. Morton
Northeastern State University
Tahlequah, OK 74464

Instruction which reflects a whole language philosophy is gaining in popularity. Teachers are becoming comfortable with thematic units, process writing, shared reading, and many other instructional elements which support the whole language philosophy. The whole language assessment component, however, can be quite challenging. Teachers are searching for acceptable assessment alternatives. Currently, the most widely used approach to assessment in whole language classrooms is the portfolio.

Whenever I talk to teachers in classes, workshops, or conference sessions, I find that they have plenty of questions about portfolio assessment. I ask them to write their questions down on paper, and as I read through these questions, I discover that there are certain questions asked more frequently than others. Here are brief answers to eight of these most frequently asked questions about portfolio assessment.

1. <u>What is a portfolio?</u> A portfolio is a system for organizing evidence of the literacy development of individual students. Physically, it can be a file folder, an envelope folder, an accordion file, or whatever you want it to be. My preference is the six pleat accordion file.

CS010710

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Johnnye Morton
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

However, what you choose will be determined by what and how much you decide to include in the portfolio.

2. <u>What should be put in the portfolio?</u> No rigid rules or guidelines exist as to what or how much to include in a portfolio. A review of the literature reveals the use of a wide variety of things; however, Valencia (1990) advises teachers to be selective and include those things which reflect instructional goals. A perusal of the literature reveals that a typical portfolio might include (but not necessarily limited to) any combination of the following.

-teacher observation notes
-check lists of literacy behaviors
-journal entries
-writing samples
-tape recorded reading samples
-running records
-conference notes
-response logs
-reading logs
-attitude and interest surveys
-interviews
-samples of student's best work
- written retellings
-oral retellings (audio tapes)
-student's self assessment

-teacher's evaluative summary of portfolio contents

It seems that portfolios can include any authentic piece of evidence which documents literacy development. The portfolio should NOT include tests, workbook pages or other graded daily assignments.

For teachers or administrators who feel the need for more structure and consistency, Valencia (1990) suggests including two categories of documentation, 1) required - which provides the means of looking systematically across students as well as within; and 2) supporting - which provides the additional evidence needed to develop a "complete picture" of the student's abilities.

3. How much should be put in the portfolio? While there is no established number of items for the portfolio, Valencia (1990) reminds us that the more measures one has, the more reliable will be the conclusions about the child's literacy development. Begin by including whatever seems reasonable. Adjustments can be made as confidence and experience with portfolios are gained.

4. How do I find time for portfolios? The best answer I can give is that you don't "find time"; it just becomes something you do routinely. Decide what is to be included in the portfolios and as that evidence becomes available, simply drop it in. Relatively little time is actually

required for keeping the portfolio. Some time is required, however, to periodically evaluate the contents of the portfolio and to summarize that evaluation. With experience this process will require only a little more time than transferring grades from the gradebook to the report card.

5. Are checklists available? Numerous checklists are available from various sources. However, the best and most valid checklists are teacher-made. Your check list must reflect your instructional objectives and what you value. Looking at examples of checklists, however, may be of benefit in developing your own. Whole Language Evaluation, The Administrator's Guide to Whole Language, Literacy Development in the Early Years, and Teaching Writing Balancing Process and Product are just a few of the many books that contain checklists.

6. I am required to give letter grades. How can I do this if I use portfolio assessment? This is a tough question to answer. The letter grade system was designed to accommodate the skills-based definition of reading and writing. It simply does not fit the whole language model. My suggestion is that you try to educate the administration by showing them the difference in qualitative (portfolios) and quantitative (number and letter grades) assessment. Since reading is not a content subject, it makes no sense to assign a letter grade. If, however, you are forced to give

a letter grade, my best suggestion is be creative. You might try assigning a point system to those activities you value. Example:

Writing in journal for five minutes	5 points
Silently reading for five minutes	5 points
Sharing at group conference	10 points

Whatever you value or want the students to be doing during reading and writing could become the basis for your point system. Atwell (1989) describes the point system she developed for her middle school students. Her model has proven useful for many teachers.

7. How do I start a portfolio? Most teachers discover they already have documented evidence of literacy growth. So look around and see what you have that could be put into a portfolio. Portfolios should ideally be started at the beginning of the year, but can be started at any time. All it takes to get started is a commitment and some general understanding of the concept of portfolio assessment.

8. How can I communicate to parents and administrators? Before starting portfolio assessment, it is a good idea to communicate your intent to the administration and to parents. Although some parents and administrators are at first skeptical, teachers report that when they show the portfolios, the value becomes obvious. The contents of the portfolio provide the teacher with evidence necessary to

make evaluative statements regarding the strengths and needs of students. Lapp and Flood (1989) suggest including the use of graphs and other visuals which demonstrate growth in specific areas when communicating with parents. Reporting progress to parents through narrative reports and perusing the portfolio with the parent is much more meaningful than a letter grade on a report card went home with the student.

Conclusions Portfolio assessment is an evolving concept. The information here is a "current status" report. Although I have focused on the portfolio as a method for assessing literacy growth, it can also be used to assess growth in other areas as well. To successfully incorporate portfolios into your classroom, it is imperative that you read, read, read. Almost every issue of The Reading Teacher has some new information on portfolios. Experiment, talk to other teachers who use portfolios, then read some more. We must persistently strive to develop meaningful, acceptable literacy assessment.

REFERENCES

Atwell, N. (1989). In the middle. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Eggleton, J. (1990). Whole language evaluation. Hong Kong: Applecross, Ltd. Distributed by The Wright Group.

Flood, J. and Lapp, D. (1989). Reporting reading progress: A comparison portfolio for parents. The Reading Teacher, 42 (7), 508-514

Heald-Taylor, G. (1989). The administrator's guide to whole

language. New York: Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc.

Morrow, L. (1989). Literacy Development in the Early Years. N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Routman, R. (1988). Transitions. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Thompkins, G. (1990). Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Valencia, S.W. (1990). A portfolio approach to classroom reading assessment: The whys, whats, and hows. The Reading Teacher, 43, (4), 338-340.